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A FIVE POINT FORMULA FOR RIOT-FREE INDIA

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(Secular Perspective February 1-15, 2013)

India's legacy of communalism and communal violence is here to stay, if one goes by activities of rightwing Hindutva forces and government's total inaction, nay, paralysis. Communalism in India is taking long strides and the lull after Gujarat riots in communal violence has been broken and now communal riots are more frequent. Assam riots had shaken the country like Gujarat did and series of riots have been taking place, one after the other or what M.J.Akbar called, during eighties riot after riot.

The secular forces, and I do not doubt their sincerity, do feel concerned about these riots but their concern lasts no longer than the riot itself. This halting approach does not make much of an impact. It is RSS mission and they work with great zeal round the year to spread communal poison but secular forces, much less in number, even much less in zeal, are no match for RSS Pracharaks.

And the Government, even of Congress or of Mayavati or of Mulayamsingh Yadav, less said the better. Only left on one hand, and, Laluprasad Yadav and now Nitish Kumar have tried to tackle this problem more seriously. Lalu Prasad and Nitish Kumar acted out of political compulsion but have stuck to their guns. In fact both are competing with each other to attract Muslim vote. The way Bihar became riot-free (as well as West Bengal due to policies of left) shows that if state is determined no riots can take place.

The Congress, though ideologically secular, has always followed quite dubious policies and has never made serious attempt to check communal violence in states rules by it. Even on Babri Masjid-Ramjanambhumi controversy it never took clear and determined stand and even allowed it to be demolished and plunged the country into inferno of communal violence.

Most of the politicians are in fact interested in promoting communal and caste divisions as identity politics benefits them immensely in terms of delivery of votes. As gravity of economic problem increases and inflation runs wild, identity politics becomes even more important for them as the failure to solve vital economic problems is compensated by identity votes.

Thus what could be the solution for the problem of communal problem? No easy and short term solution is possible, to be sure. Also, whatever the solution politicians' involvement is necessary? In democracy one cannot dispense with politicians, good or bad. If not for anything else, some politicians can respond in order to garner minority votes. After a lot of deliberations I have evolved a five-point solution to the problem in the long term as no immediate solution is possible.

Point number one is total change in syllabus, especially of medieval history and modern history pertaining to freedom struggled and division of the country in 1947. It is regrettable that even

after 64 years of our freedom our approach to medieval history has not changed. We still use utterly simplistic versions of medieval history resulting in controversy of demolition of temples.

The phenomenal success of Ram Janambhoomi controversy was the result of mindset created by such version of history. Mehmood Ghaznavi and Aurangzeb lead the list of temple bashers. There is no mention, even cursorily cursory of our composite culture and efforts made by Sufi saints, writers, poets and musicians to build bridges between two communities. Sufis like Baba Farid, Moinuddin Chishti, Miyan Meer, Nizamuddin Awliya, Mirza Jane Janan, Dara Shikoh besides musicians, architects, poets and others to fuse two cultures together and bring two communities together.

Students studying history have not even heard their names. It would be of immense help to introduce a supplementary text, or at least a chapter on richness of our composite culture to make students realize that both the communities and its intellectual and religious leaders were close to each other and were contributing immensely to enrich our culture religiously, spiritually and intellectually.

Dara Shikoh even wrote a book *Majma'ul Bahrayn* (i.e. Comingling of Two Oceans i.e. Hinduism and Islam) wherein Dara has shown convincingly that two religions are not at logger heads but come close to each other. Such works can greatly contribute to bringing two communities together even today. The fact that such important contributions are excluded from our textbooks shows we are more interested in division than in unity. We must put pressure on politicians to include such materials in our history textbooks.

Similarly our textbooks on modern history and freedom struggle are highly biased against minorities, They hardly highlight the role played by these communities in freedom struggle. The names like Maulana Mehmoodul Hasan, Maulana Husain Ahmed Madani, Maulana Ubaidullah Sindhi, Maulana Hifzurrehman etc. are not even mentioned who, made great sacrifices for freedom of the county and many of whom were exiled to Malta, Andaman Nicobar etc. They also launched *Reshmi Rumal* Conspiracy to spread message of freedom and paid heavily for that.

The textbooks give an impression as if most of the Muslims, with few exceptions were on the side of Pakistan though the truth is otherwise. A vast majority of Muslims was against partition and for unity of the country. Even today most of the Muslims are held responsible for partition and this remains a prominent issue in many communal riots. It will be in the interest of the country to teach correct version of history of freedom struggle and the role played by Muslims in freedom struggle.

2) The second point of vital importance is focus on value-education. Today the entire focus of our education is promoting career rather than character. In our education system, for lack of values, career has become most important and character building has been completely marginalized. I do not want to discuss reasons here but it is indeed a great tragedy for us. Also, our education system produces conforming mind rather than thinking mind. An education system which fails to produce thinking and critical mind is worth nothing. Our education system produces only career-oriented mind.

Not only that our education system creates prejudiced mind, prejudiced against minorities, tribals and dalits. It is anything but healthy mind. Thus by overhauling education system we will do great service to the cause of our nation. It would respect rights of poor, weaker sections and would be more inclusive. Today education system is part of the problem, let us make it part of the solution.

3) Reforming the police system: Our police are product of the same education system and it also gets influenced by uncritical stories in media about minorities and other weaker sections of society and hence has been horribly communalized. We cannot eliminate riots from India or we cannot handle riots properly without comprehensive police reforms. It is horribly prejudiced. In riot after riot after riot we hear stories of how police promotes, rather prevents communal riots.

I have investigated communal riots right from Jabalpur riot in 1961 to Gujarat riots in 2002 and have conducted more than 150 police workshops for peace and harmony and have found that police too is a part of the problem rather than solution. Mr. V.N.Rai who was high ranking police official from U.P. cadre and is at present V.C. of Mahatma Gandhi Hindi University, Wardha, concluded through his research on 'Role of Police in Communal Riots" in National Police Academy, Hyderabad that police is highly communalized. He also wrote a novel in Hindi on Allahabad riots *Shajhar Mein Curfew* in which he portrays role of police in Allahabad riots and shows how it shows solidarity with Hindu community.

Thus I propose that secular orientation from time to time through refresher courses, apart from secular orientation along with professional graining before joining the service is highly necessary. I have seen from my experience that such orientation influences police attitude a lot. I have also lectured at National Police Academy, Hyderabad and some other police academies and seen the results. If it is done regularly and compulsorily it will have very encouraging results. Recently in Dhule riots in Maharashtra police directly killed 6 Muslim youth by firing at them over the chest and neck in violation of police manual. The Government took no action, did not even suspend any of the concerned officer.

4) Enactment of Communal Violence and Targeted Bill. This law, if passed, will go a long way in curbing communal violence as it fixes responsibility on concerned officers. This Bill has been drafted very carefully by responsible secular activists and gave to Sonia Gandhi to get it enacted. Government convened National Integration Council meeting to test the waters and BJP leaders like Arun Jaitly and Sushma Swaraj mounted such a severe attack on it that government was unnerved and since then the Bill is lying in cold storage. It should be immediately revived, if necessary by some amendments and enacted. Also if it is accompanied by implementation of fifth Police Commission Report it will greatly help. This Bill also ensures adequate reparations and compensation in the event of outbreak of violence.

5) Mixed and cosmopolitan living: With every riot Hindus and Muslims begin to leave mixed areas and get polarized religion wise. It greatly harms the cause of integration. In such events communal propaganda and rumours become far more effective. Government should not register any society unless it has members of all communities in it i.e. Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Parsis and Sikhs as well as Buddhists and Jains. In our country caste and religion wise societies

are quite common. In Singapore, as per law no society will be registered until all religious and ethnic communities are included.

These are five suggestions which, if accepted, can go a long way in promoting peace and communal harmony. I know it is not easy to persuade government to implement these suggestions as these suggestions go against vested interests, particularly political interests as today elections are won by exclusion rather than inclusion, on the basis of identities rather than on the basis of programmes and people's needs. Nevertheless these suggestions can be discussed in public fora.

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